

Year A, April 9, 2017
Palm Sunday
Christ Church, Mexia

I have always liked it that in the Episcopal Church everyone is a participant in the worship service, not just someone who sits passively. And that is never more evident than on this Sunday, when we start outside with the Liturgy of the Palms and continue inside where many more people than usual participate in the Passion Gospel – that story that swings us from joy to sadness in a very short time. And perhaps we should feel sad about the pain and suffering, the humiliation, that Jesus had to endure as revealed in this gospel. No one should have to endure those things, even if they were guilty of something. But I'd like to make two points this morning.

Have you ever known anyone who knew they only had a limited time to live? If so, you may be able to better relate to Jesus' situation. Jesus knew what lay in store for him and yet he walked that road bravely. He could have done things differently. For example, did he really have to ride on that colt to the adulation of the crowds so publicly when entering Jerusalem and thereby make certain that the Roman and Jewish leaders could no longer tolerate his presence among them? So, in effect, he creates the final straw, if you will, that insures they will insist on his death.

And it's not just knowing he is going to die. How must it feel to know that someone close to you, someone who has been your friend and companion, will betray you? And yet Jesus does nothing but facilitate that act, again knowing where it leads. And that's not all - he knows another really close friend will deny his relationship with him three times, and the others will disappear rather than stand by him at his death. How would you feel under these circumstances? And he doesn't defend himself against the false testimony of the trials. He could have saved himself in a number of ways and at a number of times, he had the knowledge and the power to act – he even says he could have called legions to defend him - but he walks that road that leads to Golgotha. He does it for us! For you and me... that is what we must remember at all times.

Yes, he dies a slow and tortuous death, and that is very sad, but what happens when he dies? The sky has turned dark, "At that moment (the moment of his death) the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." There is no way that could not have been caused/accomplished by humans. And more importantly, as the Rev.

Whitney Rice so eloquently reminds us: "At that moment our souls are torn in two. At that moment, the living love between God the Father and the incarnate Jesus Christ is torn in two. At that moment, the disciples hope for the defeat of Rome and the rule of Jesus on earth is torn in two." And she continues; "This is the terrible risk that we take, by committing to walk with Jesus through Holy Week, that our hearts (may) be torn in two by this experience.

But Jesus' life and our emotional equilibrium are not the only things destroyed on Good Friday. We know now that the barrier between God and humanity is torn in two. (Nothing stands between us anymore.) The record of our sin is torn in two. (We are forgiven.) The reign of death is torn in two. (We can now have eternal life with God.)" These are the things that help us overcome the sadness of this story. And these are the good news items on which we should focus.

And the other point, is the recognition by the gentile Roman Centurion, after the earthquake and resurrection of the souls from the tombs, "Truly this man was God's son."

It took many things happening to reveal that truth to the Centurion. What does it take for us to recognize that? Jesus was God Incarnate, and this is his church – God's continuing and visible presence in this world. Never forget what that means!

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.